

On behalf of the Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops and 236 Catholic schools served (for Pre-Kindergarten to 12th grade students), I am writing to provide comments to the FCC on the E-Rate NPRM, proceeding 13-184. The E-Rate has been of great importance to our system of Catholic schools in Florida because it has helped our more than 84,000 students gain access to a wealth of online resources, to communicate and collaborate, and to develop the 21st-century skills necessary for college and career. However, E-Rate funding levels have not kept pace with our current and future bandwidth needs. We thus urge you to consider raising the E-Rate funding level to at least \$5 billion per year, which is close to the average demand level for each of the past two years.

In collaboration with our Catholic school superintendents, we know that seamlessly infusing digital learning throughout the school curriculum is a prerequisite for students to graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's global economy. Access to high speed broadband is the key for modern teaching and learning to occur in all schools across the country.

Our schools use digital learning to personalize learning, provide online classes, meet common core state standards, administer online assessments, make data driven decisions etc. For example, an example of digital learning in Florida's Catholic schools is when students take certain classes they would not otherwise be able to study such as Mandarin Chinese via the nationally recognized Florida Virtual School (FLVS) Program.

The network for many of our inner-city and rural schools – serving some of the lowest income families in Florida – is failing to keep up with demand. The need for a high speed reliable network is only going to increase in the near future.

The E-rate program has been a phenomenal success in bringing Internet access to almost every classroom in America. In the last funding cycle, applications from schools and libraries totaled more than \$5 billion, more than double the available funding. We respectfully urge the FCC to increase funding for the E-Rate program to at least \$5 billion to meet this demand. All students need access to high speed broadband. Our nation's future depends on their success.